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CIA Oversight Gap

Adm. Stansfield Turner is having his troubles as director of the Central Intelligence Agency with one revelation after another tumbling out into the public domain. The Navy, where you gave orders and they were carried out or there was hell to pay, was nothing like this.

But there is one advantage he has over his predecessors. He has no team of experts looking over his shoulder and now and then even breathing down his neck.

The Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, made up of distinguished citizens with extensive military and scientific knowledge, had been a watchdog over the CIA under a succession of presidents. They had met conscientiously for two days each month to review the work of the agency.

Suddenly, without any warning, the members got what apparently were form letters from President Carter informing them that, by executive order, he had abolished the board. His explanation was that "the National Security Council system and the intelligence community themselves, as structured in this administration, can now effectively review and assess intelligence activities."

This was received with considerable skepticism by members of the board. They got a laugh from a followup letter. Each member received a blank with instructions on how to file for unemployment compensation since he had been dismissed from a federal job. Accompanying forms had been filled out requiring little more than the applicant's signature.

This went out to men such as Edwin H. Land, chairman of the board of Polaroid Corporation and a pioneer in the

science of optics and high-level photography; Gordon Gray, former secretary of the army, a director of the Reynolds Tobacco Company and head of a publishing and broadcasting complex; Melvin R. Laird, former secretary of defense, and counselor for national affairs for Reader's Digest.

The board has never had a political coloration. Gray, a Democrat, has been a member since 1961 and was once chairman. The one woman member, Clare Boothe Luce, is a Republican. Washington lawyer Edward Bennett Williams has long been a prominent figure in the Democratic hierarchy.

It is probably a fair appraisal that most of the members had no strong political attachments. One of the most distinguished scientific members was William O. Baker, president of the Bell Telephone Laboratories. Another with a remarkable reach in nuclear weaponry was Edward Teller, director of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory at the University of California.

They were unable to detect all the skulduggery and the folly concealed by the cloak of CIA secrecy and brought to light with devastating consequences. Moreover, there was a limit on their action since the board reported its findings and recommendations to the president. The responsibility to act then fell on the chief executive.

But I believe they were genuinely dedicated to contributing to a vital intelligence operation. The abolition of the board has left a gap, and this could have some bearing on the credibility of the CIA director.

The gap has not been filled by the Intelligence Oversight Board. Composed of three men—Thomas Farmer, a Washington lawyer, as chairman; William Scranton, former governor of Pennsylvania; and Albert Gore, a former senator from Tennessee—the IOB has the sole responsibility of detecting and reporting on wrongdoing by the various intelligence agencies, including the FBI. They are conscientious men, but they have no power other than to report their findings to the president, who in a recent statement underscored their authority.

That Turner is unhappy in his role as director of an agency riven by doubts of the past and uncertainties about the future is not hard to understand. Increasingly, those long familiar with the CIA believe that a military man is not the ideal choice for the post of director.

The appointment of Frank C. Carlucci to be deputy director is interpreted as a hopeful sign of judicious administration other than the order by fiat prevailing under Turner. As ambassador to Portugal, his last post, he overruled CIA operatives who had been insisting on keeping to themselves the names of their contacts with carry-overs from the regime that had held power before the Communist-Socialist takeover. This authority over all U.S. personnel seems to have been overruled by a later Turner directive.

In earlier difficult diplomatic posts and subsequently in the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Health Education and Welfare, Carlucci has shown both his courage and his administrative capacity. Ultimately he could be a replacement for Turner.

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